

Message Text

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45

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 OPR-02 SY-07 PM-09 NSC-10 SS-14 RSC-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-09 NSAE-00 PA-03 USIA-12 PRS-01

DPW-01 IO-12 EUR-25 NIC-01 T-03 L-03 RSR-01 /129 W

----- 091012

R 191400 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8854

INFO CINCPAC

USDEL FRANCE

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

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E. O. 11652 N/ A

TAGS: PINS VS

SUBJECT: THE MARCH 15 XOAI XIEM PAGODA INCIDENT

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SAIGON FROM CAN THO MAR 18
REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO

QUOTE CAN THO 0056

1 SUMMARY: AN EXPLOSION AT THE XOAI XIEM PAGODA KILLED 23 PEOPLE AND WOUNDED 88 ON MARCH 15. THE ICCS AND US AND GVN ELEMENTS OF THE JMC INVESTIGATED THE INCIDENT. THEY WERE GREETED BY ORDERLY DEMONSTRATIONS AND EVIDENCE OF THE ATROCITY. THE VIET CONG ARE GENERALLY BLAMED FOR THE INCIDENT BUT THE SEEMINGLY SENSELESSNESS OF THE ACT MAKES IT HARD TO DETERMINE WHAT THEY HOPED TO GAIN.

2. THE EXPLOSION: AT 1:45 A. M. ON THE MORNING OF 15 MARCH, AN EXPLOSION OCCURRED IN FRONT OF THE XOAI XIEM PAGODA, WHICH IS LOCATED NEAR TRA CU DISTRICT TWON IN VINH BINH. APPROXIMATELY
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1000 PEOPLE (MOSTLY VIETNAMESE OF CAMBODIAN ORIGIN) WERE GATHERED IN THE PAGODA TO CELEBRATE VAN SON, THE CAMBODIAN HARVEST FESTIVAL. THE EXPLOSION TOOK PLACE IN THE MIDST OF THE CROWD AND 13 PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND 98 WOUNDED. BY MORNING TEN OF THE WOUNDED HAD DIED, PARTIALLY BECAUSE THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH MEDICINE TO TREAT ALL THE WOUNDED. THE TYPE OF EXPLOSIVE IS NOT KNOWN.

3. THE INVESTIGATION: (A). BY 8:00 LOCAL OFFICIALS WERE PLANNING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE ICCS. VICTIMS PREPARED LETTERS OF GRIEVANCE AND POSTERS AND BANNERS WERE PREPARED FOR A DEMONSTRATION. THEY DID SO AT THE PROMPTING OF LOCAL OFFICIALS WHO MAY NOT HAVE ACTED ON INSTRUCTIONS. THE PROVINCE CHIEF HAD PREVIOUSLY ORDERED THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO DEMONSTRATIONS WHEN THE ICCS IS PRESENT. HE IS SAID TO FEAR DEMONSTRATIONS COULD BE TAKEN OVER BY THE VC. (B). THE PROVINCE CHIEF BROUGHT THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE PROVINCE COUNCIL AND THE VENERABLES OF BOTH THE KHEMARANIKAY AND THERAVADA BRANCHES OF THE CAMBODIAN BUDDHISM TO THE PAGODA ON THURSDAY MORNING. ABOUT 9:30 THE 9 TH DIVISION COMMANDER ARRIVED. HE WAS PRESENT WHEN THE ICCS AND THE US/ GVN DELEGATIONS OF THE JMC MADE THEIR INSPECTIONS. (C). WHEN THE ICCS ARRIVED, THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE PROVINCE COUNCIL PRESENTED TWO PETITIONS AND HUNDREDS OF LETTERS OF DENUNCIATION. PEOPLE CARRIED SIGNS PROTESTING THE ATROCITY, BUT THE CROWD WAS ORDERLY. THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE PROVINCE, MR. VEN, SAID HE ADDRESSED THE CROWD TO EXPLAIN WHO THE ICCS DELEGATES WERE. HE FEARED VIOLENCE IF THE PEOPLE THOUGHT THEY WERE NVA OR VC DELEGATES. (D). AT THE PAGODA, BODIES OF SIX OF THE VICTIMS AND BLOODY SHIRTS, SANDALS AND TROUSERS WERE SET OUT AS EVIDENCE. SOON AFTER THE ICCS ARRIVED, A MOBILE MEDICAL TEAM ARRIVED BY HELICOPTER AND SET UP AN AID STATION IN THE PAGODA. ALL EIGHTY- EIGHT OF THE WOUNDED WERE TREATED IN FRONT OF THE ICCS. (E). PEOPLE INTERROGATED BY THE ICCS WERE APPARENTLY ANGERED WHEN THE ICCS QUESTIONED WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INCIDENT. QTE DID YOU THINK THE GOVERNMENT WAS GOINT TO BLOW UP ITS OWN PEOPLE UNQTE, ASKED MR VEN INDIGNANTLY. THE HUNGARIANS PURSUED QUESTIONS THAT INDICATED THEY WISHED TO PROVE THE INCIDENT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

4. ICCS REACTIONS: DURING THE SHARPE VISIT ON MARCH 17, THE CANADIAFLETOGEW ON BRIEFED THE PRESS ACCOMPANYING THE MINISTER ON THE XOAI XIEM INCIDENT. ALTHOUGH THE INVESTIGATION REPORT IS NOT FINAL, THE CANADIAN SPOKESMAN STATED THAT THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCIDENT APPEARED TO BE A CLEAR VC VIOLATION. THE CANADIANS

ARE HOPING FOR A UNANIMOUS FINDING AND WISH TO INCLUDE A
STATEMENT FROM THE XOAI XIEM CHIEF MONK THAT THE VC HAD TRIED
DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS TO INTIMIDATE HIM. (SEE PARA 5).

5. FIXING THE BLAME : THOUGH PEOPLE I
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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
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